U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Saginaw River Watershed Lake Sturgeon Project

During the month of April, Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski, Adam Kowalski, James Boase, Aaron Woldt, Susan Wells and Project Leader Jerry McClain conducted a lake sturgeon project in the Saginaw River watershed. Steve Kahl, Ed DeVries, and Jim Dastyck from the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge also participated in this project and provided invaluable help. This project is funded through the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Anecdotal evidence suggests that lake sturgeon use the Saginaw River watershed during the spring spawning season, but very little is known about the importance of this watershed to the lake sturgeon population of Lake Huron. The goal of this project is to document lake sturgeon use of the Saginaw River system. Partners involved with this project include the Michigan DNR, DOW Chemical, the city of Frankenmuth, WIN, and the friends group "Friends of the Shiawassee."

Beginning on April 11, Alpena FRO staff deployed and retrieved egg mats and set lines in an attempt to document lake sturgeon usage of this watershed. Twenty four egg mats were deployed on the Cass River at the Frankenmuth dam, and 48 egg mats were deployed on the Tittabawassee River below the DOW dam. Two set lines were fished at the confluence of the Saginaw and Tittabawassee rivers, and one set line was fished at the confluence of the Saginaw and Cass rivers. Egg mats were checked weekly, and set lines were fished daily. Upon retrieval, Alpena FRO staff examined the egg mats for the presence of lake sturgeon eggs. No lake sturgeon eggs were found in the month of April, but non-target species (suckers, walleye) had deposited eggs on the mats. In April, no sub-adult or adult lake sturgeon were caught using the set lines either, but a few non-target species were caught. Egg mats and set lines will be deployed in May until water temperatures consistently rise above 16 ° C.

This project will continue in 2006 and 2007. By 2007 the Alpena FRO should be able to determine if lake sturgeon indeed occupy and use the Saginaw River watershed for spawning purposes. This project is an example of the Alpena FRO's commitment to the following

Fisheries Vision Priorities: “Partnerships and Accountability” and “Aquatic Species Conservation and Management”.

Scott Koproski

Photo- Alpena FRO

Spring Spawner Reduction Efforts Underway for Ruffe in Thunder Bay River, Lake Huron

Alpena FRO began removal efforts for spawning phase adult Eurasian ruffe (ruffe) in the Thunder Bay River in Alpena, MI on April 12, 2005. Ruffe are an aquatic nuisance fish species that are thought to compete with native species for food and habitat resources. Ruffe were first discovered in the Thunder Bay River in 1995 and it remains the only location where ruffe have been found within the lake. They spawn in the spring at water temperatures 5-18 C. Spawning phase ruffe have been captured from the Thunder Bay River in past years.

The reduction effort was initiated in 2002 and has been conducted annually. Small mesh gillnets are used to remove adult spawning phase ruffe prior to release of sex products. Approximately 100 spawning phase ruffe were captured and removed in 2002 and a fraction of that number in 2003. No ruffe were captured in 2004 and efforts in 2005 will help identify if ruffe are continuing to spawn and persist in the Thunder Bay area.

Management and control of aquatic nuisance species is necessary in order to protect, manage, and restore native species and their habitats. This project addresses the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" component of the Fisheries Vision for the Future.

Anjanette Bowen

2004 Lake Huron Lake Whitefish Distribution Study Data Compiled

In April 2005, Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt compiled lake whitefish tagging data from Service and partner agencies in a shared database as part of a USFWS Restoration Act funded Lake Huron lake whitefish distribution study. The goals of this study are to determine the spatial distribution and movement patterns of 8 selected lake whitefish stocks in Lake Huron and to determine the contribution of each stock to commercial fishery yields. The 8 stocks selected for this study are Detour, Alpena (Middle Island & Thunder Bay), Saginaw Bay, Burnt Island, South Bay mouth, the Fishing Islands, Douglas Point, and Sarnia. Partner agencies for this study include the Service, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Bruce Power, Chippewas of Nawash, Saugeen First Nation, and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

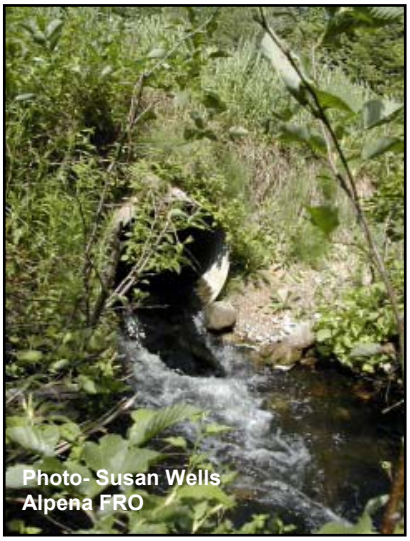
In the fall of 2004, over 12,000 lake whitefish were tagged by the 7 partner agencies across all sampling sites. Data was entered by each agency into a standard database designed by Woldt and sent to the Alpena FRO for inclusion in a central study database. Woldt provided each agency with data collection protocols and database formats prior to the study’s start. Woldt has been

working with agency data representatives to ensure data accuracy and timely entry. To date, data has been entered from 3 agencies. Once all data has been entered, Woldt will distribute copies of the central database to all partners. The full database is needed to accurately process tag returns and issue rewards. Each tag carries a $5 US reward.

Serving as database manager for this study aids efforts to determine the spatial distribution and movement patterns of lake whitefish stocks and to determine the contribution of each stock to the commercial fishery. This will allow for better harvest management and protection of lake whitefish stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Aaron Woldt

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management



Road Stream Crossings Within the Rifle River Watershed

On April 13th, Biologist Wells toured stream road crossing sites in Ogemaw County within the Riffle River Watershed. Seven people representing agencies from the US Department of Agriculture, Huron Pines RC&D, the Ogemaw County Road Commission (OCRC), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) looked at 10 road crossing sites for potential funding through the Service Fish Passage and Fish Habitat Restoration Funds. Three perched culvert projects have been identified as fish passage barriers. These projects are barriers for native brook trout prohibiting movement of the species into the upper reaches of the Rifle River Watershed. Biological data within the system around the barriers are available through Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). The MDNR is actively involved with projects within the Rifle River Watershed and support those projects identified during the tour.

Cost estimates for each of the three sites have been requested from the OCRC. Huron Pines RC&D will be requesting funding from the Service and other funding organizations once estimates are complete.

This is an example of collaboration between government and non-profit organizations to enhance aquatic habitat which will benefit fish and wildlife resources. This project provides assistance for enhancing fish passage for book trout into reaches of the Rifle River Watershed. This project involves collaboration between many partners and addresses the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future priority of Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, and Partnerships and Accountability.

Susan Wells


Photo- Heather Enterline
Alpena FRO

Canoe Livery Requesting Partners for Fish and Wildlife Assistance

Biologist Enterline accompanied by Mrs. Donna Hardies of the Montmorency Conservation District visited an erosion site along the Thunder Bay River in Atlanta, Michigan on April 27. The landowners had recently purchased the property, and are re-opening the Atlanta Canoe Livery this summer. Erosion on their property has been caused by the combination of foot traffic, stormwater discharge from the Village of Atlanta, and the discharge from a dam on the main branch of the Thunder Bay River. The Thunder Bay River/Black River Work Crew may be able to address the erosion on this site if proper permits can be obtained in a timely manner. The site will be repaired with a combination of biologs, whole log revetments, access stairs, and vegetative plantings. Funding will be provided in part by the Service Fish Habitat Restoration Program. The Montmorency Conservation District will supply administrative and logistical support, and the landowners will supply some materials and la bor.

Repair of this 500-foot erosion site will reduce the sediment load into the Thunder Bay River improving the quality of aquatic life within the watershed. Completion of aquatic habitat restoration projects contribute toward the "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management" component of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Heather Enterline

Partnerships and Accountability

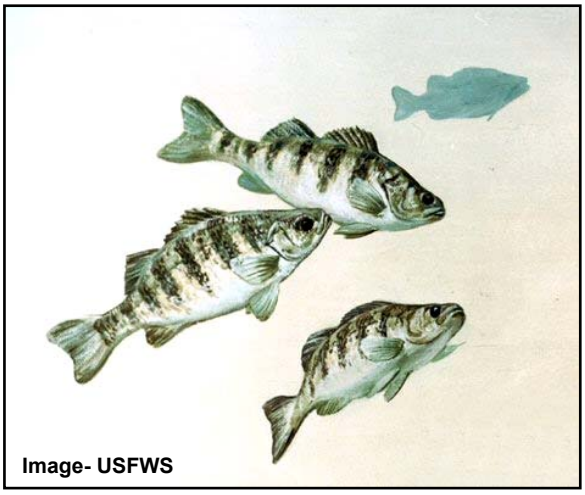


Image- USFWS

Genetic Samples Collected From Yellow Perch for University of Toledo Study

During April, Alpena FRO collected genetics samples from yellow perch for research conducted by Dr. Carol Stepien at the University of Toledo. All fish had been captured from Thunder Bay, Lake Huron as by-catch during spring efforts to remove Eurasian ruffe from the Thunder Bay River with small mesh gillnets. A portion of the pectoral fin was removed and preserved in alcohol for the genetic analysis, and biological data including length, sex, and capture location were recorded.

Dr. Stepien is collecting genetics samples from native yellow perch and walleye in each of the Great Lakes and will be using the samples to develop a high-resolution, low cost DNA data base for analyzing fish stock structure in the Great Lakes. The study is funded by Sea Grant.

Partnerships are a key component of the Service's mission to conserve and protect fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. It is necessary to learn about native and invasive species to be able to provide for their management. This effort addresses the "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" components of the Fishery Program's Vision for the Future.

Anjanette Bowen

Cooperation with Native Americans

Technical Fisheries Committee Submits Recommended Lake Trout Harvest Limits for 2005

The Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC) met twice during the month of April to produce lake trout harvest limits for 2005 tribal commercial and state recreational fisheries in 1836 Treaty waters of lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron. On April 6 the TFC met to review preliminary harvest limits produced by the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) and discuss lake trout population trends in the respective lake trout management units, then on April 27 approved the final harvest limits for the upcoming season. Using the most current and statistically valid assessment and harvest data available, the MSC uses Statistical Catch at Age Modeling (SCAA) to produce recommended safe harvest limits for the upcoming fishing season. Alpena FRO project leader McClain (TFC Chair) and Treaty Fisheries Unit leader Woldt (MSC co-Chair) attended the meetings. McClain mailed the final harvest limit recommendations to the Parties on May 11.

Interagency participation in the Modeling Sub-Committee and the Technical Fisheries Committee ensures cooperation and agreement for establishment of safe harvest limits for lake trout. The effort is consistent with and supportive of the Partnerships and Accountability, Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Cooperation with Native Americans, and Leadership in Science and Technology priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Jerry McClain

Public Use

Fisheries a Part of Earth Day Celebration in Lansing

Live fish and Service Fisheries were a popular attraction at the second annual Earth Day Celebration and Bring Your Child to Work Day event that took place on April 21 at Constitution Hall in Lansing, Michigan. The event highlighted the importance of the Earth's resources and was hosted by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Michigan Department of Agriculture, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The Service provided live native and invasive

fish in aquaria for viewing and stressed the problems associated with aquatic invasive species. The U.S. Geological Survey's Hammond Bay Biological Station provided sea lamprey for the event, and the Alpena FRO collected live native species including yellow perch, rock bass, pumpkinseed sunfish, and bluegill. The booth was sponsored by the Michigan DEQ and was focused on Aquatic Invaders in the Great Lakes. Bob Kavetsky of the East Lansing Field Office and Anjanette Bowen of the Alpena FRO helped staffed the booth. Over 500 children, some with parents and some with school groups, attended the event.

This activity was a great opportunity to partner with state conservation programs to provide a unified approach and public education about aquatic invasive species. Conservation and protection of invasive species is important in order to conserve and protect native species and public education about invasives is important toward slowing and preventing their spread to new areas. This activity also supports the "Public Use" and "Partnerships and Accountability" portions of the Fishery Program's Vision for the Future.

Anjanette Bowen

Workforce Management

Gearing up for Field Season

During the month of April, Fishery Biologists Adam Kowalski and Scott Koproski readied the Alpena FRO vessels for the field season. Kowalski and Koproski inventoried required and recommended safety equipment to ensure all needed gear was on board the vessels and in working condition. Flares were inspected and replaced if expired. Other general maintenance tasks included charging vessel batteries, ensuring all the proper tools were on board, checking spare spark plugs, checking fire extinguishers, installing vessel electronics like GPS and radar, and checking the basic condition of the vessels and trailers. This year we also inspected trailer surge brakes and had all trailer wheel bearings repacked. A new four stroke motor was also installed on our shock boat. These inspections are an annual process done at the Alpena FRO to ensure the safety of employees and the condition of the vessels.

These annual inspections help provide Alpena FRO employees with a safe working environment while in the field. Maintaining all vessels in safe and proper working condition ensures that employees can effectively, efficiently, and safely perform their jobs. This is consistent with objective 7.3 of the “Workforce Management” priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Adam Kowalski